

Good Stories for Children

BY
WALT McDUGALL.

A TALE OF CHRISTMAS JOY IN THE FAIRYLAND OF WISHVILLE

Magic Spectacles Made a Man's Heart
Hard, But Finally Led to a Great
Joyous Christmas.

Wonders of a Forest of Petrified Animals
and the Very Place Where Every
Wish is Instantly Gratified.

THERE was a boy named Myron Holmes, who, with his sister Bessie, lived with a guardian, who was a very hard-hearted, cruel and mean man. His name was George W. Granitt. Before he was made the guardian of these children he had been a kindly, well-disposed man, but suddenly he was transformed into one of the most vindictive, unfeeling creatures that I have ever seen. The awful change had been caused by a pair of magic spectacles, which came into his possession and which once through these spectacles caused one to become hard, cruel and mean; wearing them constantly or frequently made the heart grow callous to all suffering, full of hate and envy, and made the wearer take a delight in giving pain to everybody. Mr. Granitt wore the spectacles until he was the meanest man in the world. He was constantly considering how he could rid himself of the two children, for he hated them more than he did anything in all the world.

Every day he pondered over the problem, but he was afraid of the police, and wished to destroy them in some way that would be safe and easy. The children were so kindly and loving that it angered him to see them feed stray cats or dogs or throw crumbs to the half-starved, almost frozen birds, or bring them to the fire to warm them, and he would kick out the poor cats or dogs into the cold, or wring the necks of the birds and throw their bodies out upon the snow, smiling a smile of fiendish delight as he did so. Many a tearful Bessie shed as she watched him commit some act of cruelty, but she never suspected the awful purpose of her guardian's wicked heart, so when one day he told her to look through the magic spectacles and obeyed him without hesitation. She was not conscious of any change, but instantly her heart hardened, and she lost all her tenderness and pity for helpless animals, and felt at once a cruel delight in seeing her guardian kick the dog. Her pretty blue eyes lost at once their soft, kindly light, and her mouth took a sharp, hard curve. Her brother, Myron, was amazed to see her when he came home throw scalding hot water upon the poor cat, and at her as if she had been transformed. Her guardian smiled grimly, for he was pleased. Then he took Myron out for a ride in his automobile, and when they were far up the river road he tossed the boy out suddenly, and without waiting to see what became of him he dashed away into the darkness.

Fell Into Wishville.

Myron fell, not as the wicked guardian had expected into the roaring river to be drowned at once, but by great good luck upon a raft of logs floating along in the river. He drifted along with him without touching the river bank, and before morning he was many miles away from home, so that when the next morning he awoke in a strange land. Strange birds stood upon the shore, strange animals stared at him from the forest, and strange trees and flowers grew along the banks. At home the snow lay deep on the ground, but here all was as fresh and green as in June, and the air was warm and perfumed with flower scents. Nuts and fruits grew and beautiful butterflies flitted in the air. The raft coming close to shore, Myron sprang on land and walked along the riverbank for a distance. None of the animals seemed to fear him at all, and even the birds sat undisturbed on their nests when he passed. He ate some fruit and drank from a spring among white rocks, and strolled farther on until he came to a cliff that shut off all passage along the river. Here he paused, and was about to turn back, when a large snow owl flew up and, settling down on a tree trunk, spoke to him.

"I suppose," said the owl, blinking, "that you are one of those things they call boys. What are you doing here, pray?"

"I fear that I am lost," replied Myron.

"Nothing is lost here. You are only out of place. If you wish to leave take the tissue paper route to Wishville."

"What is that?" asked the boy.

The owl pointed with its claw at the wall of rock, and Myron saw there a great circular sheet of tissue paper spread against the bluff looking exactly like one of those big paper hoops through which the bareback riders jump. The owl added:

"Who dares to break through this paper falls into Wishville at once."

"Don't it hurt?" asked Myron.

"I don't know," said the bird. "Never tried it. I've always been satisfied, but as no one has ever come back by this route I imagine they were either killed or else too pleased to return."

"Sure it lands you in Wishville?" asked Myron, dubiously. "What sort of a place is it?"

"Can't tell you anything about it. Everybody must try it for himself. You cannot stay here, anyhow, so you might as well try it at once."

Myron replied that at once, and then threw himself against the tissue paper. He fell through at once, and, to his surprise, the great rocky wall was only about a foot thick, so he landed without injury on the other side, finding himself in a great garden filled with statues and fountains, where many

boys and girls were playing. It did not take him many minutes to discover that this was Wishville, where one has everything in the way of pleasure that one desires, simply by thinking of it. If you want a barrel of candy, there it is before you; if you wish to sail in a boat upon a lake, there's the boat and the lake at once; if you wish to see a menagerie or a dog fight or anything else, you have it as soon as the wish is formed. In fact, there is nothing you can think of in the way of pleasure or pastime that you cannot instantly possess except in one respect—you cannot

work, nor can you study in Wishville, nor can you wish for and possess anything connected with the outside world. Nobody there can wish for his friends or relatives to be with him to enjoy it all, for each one has to break through the tissue paper shield for himself. Myron plunged into all the delights of this wonderful place, for he had never had much fun in his short life, and there was no pleasure for him did not sample. From morning until late at night he pursued each joy eagerly, and tasted every bliss, and it is no wonder that for time he forgot all about his sister and guardian.

Think of having every kind of toy, every game, each delicious thing to eat without stint, and no one to molest or even to stay up all night, and you will perceive that one would scarcely have time to think of his relatives and friends outside. So Myron abandoned himself entirely to all these novel sensations, and thought of nothing but to have new pleasure until he had tried over and over again every form of enjoyment and became thoroughly sick and tired of playing, idling and loafing. Then he began to want something to do, for he had begun to learn that pleasure alone never satisfies any one. It is only because we have some work to do that play seems so enticing, and all play, like all work, makes a dull boy. But he soon discovered that there is no work in Wishville, no occupation for the mind tired of pleasure, and that everybody after a few weeks, just sat around, listless and tired, wishing for something new to amuse himself with, and not getting it, yawning and stretching from daylight until dark. He finally decided to try to return to the land where he had met the solemn owl, and at once started to find the place through which he had fallen.

This took several days of diligent search, which restored his good temper, as it was really work, and hard work, too. He was a long way from the place, of course, as he had wandered far into the garden of delight, and there were so many paths that he was often confused, but he persisted until at last one evening he suddenly came to the wall all grown over with climbing vines bearing flowers, so that it was scarcely to be recognized, but there sat the owl on a tree blinking solemnly and looking as wise as owls always do.

"Well," said Myron, "I'm back again. I've had enough, and I'd like to fall out at once, please."

"That's not as easy as you may imagine," replied the owl. "There are conditions."

"What are they?" Myron asked.

"Answered the Owl's Question.

"No one can leave here unless he can answer a question which I ask. If he can do so out he goes at once, and, beside that, if he can ask me a question which I cannot answer he can have two wishes granted to him as a parting gift."

Myron pondered for a moment, then he said:

"Go ahead and ask your question. Probably I can't answer it, but I'll try."

The owl looked more solemn than ever for a minute, and then said:

"What animal has no hair, no wool, no fur, no feathers, no scales, no horny plates, nor yet a smooth skin?"

"Gee, but that's a hard one!" cried Myron.

"It is, indeed," said the bird; "and, although I have asked many that question, it never has been answered yet. I'll give you plenty of time to think, so don't fret."

Suddenly, as Myron thought of all the animals he had ever seen, the porcupine popped into his mind, and at almost instantly he shouted:

"I've got it! It's the porcupine!"

"The owl almost fell off the branch. 'Yes,' he said, 'that's it, and you are a very smart boy. Now you may go home as soon as you want to.'"

"But you said if I asked you a question—"

"Oh, yes; I forgot, but it's impossible to ask me anything that I can't answer," replied the bird.

"Then tell me why a donkey never will cross even a little narrow stream without making an awful fuss?"

"Well," said the owl, "the donkey is in great distress."

"Always," said Myron. "He seems to dread crossing a stream."

"That's a very strange," said the owl. "I never heard of it before. I am sure I never could tell you the reason for such a remarkable action."

"Then I'll get a wish!" cried Myron in great glee.

"I shall certainly keep my promise, but I'd like to know why the donkey acts so queerly."

"I want you to grant me this wish: I want you to make my guardian a good, kind man, and give my sister her former tender disposition."

"His Sister in Danger.

"You really have two wishes in one there," said the bird, "but I'll overlook that, as you don't wish anything for yourself, as a selfish boy would have done. Your wish shall be granted, and even now your guardian has begun to change, for only last week he found that his legs were turning into stone, and it frightened him so that he was the only thing possible to prevent his whole body petrifying slowly."

"What did he do?" inquired Myron.

"He reversed the magic spectacles, and that makes them act directly opposite to their former manner, and causes those who look through them to become kindly and generous. The cure began at once, and the first thing he did was to start off to seek for your sister and yourself."

"Is my sister lost, too?" cried Myron.

"Yes. She is lost in the Hindernis-son forest, a dark, gloomy woodland, where wolves, bears and other ravenous beasts roam, and where damp, noisome toadstools are the only growing things, where giant bats and hideous snakes make the night dreadful, and where no one can live except witches and goblins. There she sits on a rock all day long, yet the wild animals never attack her, for she has a wonderful and uncanny power. Whatever she looks at turns into stone instantly, and thus she has surrounded herself with an enormous circle of stone animals and things."

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